

WASH. STAR - 22 Aug 73

Summer Interns Rate U.S. Jobs

By Jack Kneece
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"When I read my job description," said summer intern Jacques DeVries, a student at the Wharton School of Finance, "it sounded like I would be a GS-15 government scientist or something."

But DeVries and many of the 3,000 other government summer interns in Washington were quickly disillusioned by what turned out to be menial chores.

The White House invited 150 of them to a series of discussion groups at the Executive Office Building yesterday to determine what can be done to improve summer intern work and continue a liaison with such student workers after they leave Washington.

JOSEPH VOYTEK, a Pennsylvania student who has spent his summer at the Department of Labor, echoed DeVries' lament.

"The biggest question is: Do they take summer interns seriously?" Voytek said. "It really isn't altogether clear that we're looked upon as resources."

One girl who worked for a Pennsylvania congressman said she was disillusioned because she wound up "doing less than clerical work — making coffee and going for sandwiches."

Others said their supervisors were forced to accept a certain number of interns and "gave us a big stack of stuff to read when we first arrived while they tried to

figure out what to do with us."

BUT THERE WERE exceptions. John Wells and Al Padelletti, Pennsylvania students at Kings College, said they were given meaningful work with the Department of Agriculture's forestry division, actually setting up and designing computer programs.

But even Wells said he spent his first week or so shuttling documents back and forth between agencies until his bosses learned of his capabilities.

Kathy Gillette, a government official from the Department of the Interior who led one White House discussion group, said the message from the interns was clear: The government

should set up screening programs to make sure abilities of interns are suited to available jobs, and that every effort should be made to provide meaningful work for interns.

SHE SAID some government supervisors are perhaps unaware that they could "make or break" not only the summer for an intern, but discourage interest in further government work.

She said she took a quick sampling and found that only about four or five of the interns in her discussion group of 14 interns would consider making government work a career.

As one young woman expressed it: "No way — not after this summer."